

**Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired  
Rehabilitation Council  
397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, Virginia  
Approved Minutes, Quarterly Meeting  
December 13, 2008**

**Members Present:** Faye Adams, Marguerite Bardone, Pat Beattie, Melanie Brunson, Frances Daniel, Benjamin Franklin, Michael Kasey, Hortense Macon, Angela Matney, Marianne Moore, and Doug Powell

**Members Absent:** Pierre Ames, Michael Burton, Robin Metcalf, and Sherrie Phillips

**Staff Present:** Ray Hopkins, Commissioner; Bob Burton, Deputy Commissioner for Services; Joan Carneal, Staff Support; Susan Payne, VR Program Director

**Guests Present:** Danny DeBoer, Liaison for DRS SRC

**Call to Order:** Ms. Beattie called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Adoption of Agenda:** A motion was made by Ms. Brunson, seconded by Mr. Powell, and passed by unanimous voice vote that the agenda be distributed.

**Action on Minutes of the Previous Meeting:** A motion was made by Ms. Daniel, seconded by Ms. Macon and passed by unanimous voice vote that the minutes be adopted as distributed.

**Comments from the Public:** There were no comments from the public.

**Election of Chairperson for FY 2009:** Ms. Beattie opened the floor to nominations for the 2009 chairperson position. Mr. Powell nominated Ms. Beattie to serve another year as chairperson. Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Powell moved that nominations be closed and that Ms. Beattie serve as chairman for the Council another year, Ms. Brunson seconded, and it was passed by unanimous vote that Ms. Beattie serve as chairperson for the 2009 term. Ms. Beattie thanked everyone for their vote of confidence.

## **Commissioner's Report – Mr. Hopkins**

### **Budget Update**

DBVI's budget included a reduction of General Funds in an amount of less than five percent for a total of \$237,000. VRCBVI's budget included a reduction of General Funds in the amount of 15% for a total of \$28,000. DBVI is waiting now for the 2010 budget; Governor Kaine should make announcements regarding the 2010 budget during the week of December 15-19, 2008. DBVI administration does not know how the agency will be impacted by potential budget cuts.

DBVI received \$170,000 in reallocation funds for VR from RSA. Reallocation funds are made to state VR agencies when some states cannot or do not use their allotted funds either because they cannot meet the state match or do not expend the funds.

DBVI continues to monitor the budget very closely. One observation is that case service dollars are being expended and are costing more than in previous years. Typically, DBVI ends each federal fiscal year with funds remaining that can be carried over into the next fiscal. In FY 2008 there were no carryover funds resulting in DBVI having to use non-federal funds to pay the last of the 2008 expenditures.

Mr. DeBoer asked if the Council was involved with DBVI in conversations with the Secretary's office regarding budget cuts. Mr. Hopkins stated that DBVI did not include the Council in those discussions though Secretary Tavenner was familiar with the issues related to services to blind constituents. Mr. DeBoer stated that the DRS SRC is planning to attend budget hearings this year to make sure that legislators are aware of issues related to providing services to people with disabilities. Mr. Hopkins stated that DRS and DBVI SRCs need to make sure that legislators know about the impact budget cuts make on individuals receiving services.

Mr. Hopkins reported that thirty-seven percent (37%) of the 2008 VR budget was spent on assistive technology (AT). Services cost more across the board because of inflation. Ms. Beattie suggested that the Council may need to have input into financial discussions of sponsorship of AT.

## **Order of Selection**

DBVI has remained on an order of selection since 2004 when the order was first initiated. The Rehabilitation Act requires that state agencies providing VR services must either be able to provide the full range of services to all eligible individuals or have an order of selection (OOS) designed to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities first. When agencies do not have sufficient funds, states must go on an order of selection. Due to significant budget shortfall, DBVI has to prioritize services and will need to close two categories in the order of selection in the near future. Since DBVI has remained on an order of selection, no public meetings will be required.

Mr. Powell asked how an order of selection will be operationalized. Mr. Hopkins stated that he will send a memorandum to staff providing guidance. In general, individuals will apply for services and eligibility for services will be determined by the vocational rehabilitation counselor. Individuals meeting the criteria for the closed categories will be placed on a waiting list; no further VR services will be initiated. Individuals will stay on a waiting list until funding becomes available. Categories can be opened for windows of time as needed. DBVI will make determinations regarding categories to be served strictly based on available funds. Individuals already being served under an Individualized Plan for Employment at the time categories are closed will continue to receive services. An order of selection really targets individuals who come into application status after the order of selection has started.

Ms. Beattie requested that information regarding the order of selection be sent to members. Ms. Payne will prepare a simplified version explaining the order of selection to forward to members.

Mr. Kasey commented that if a great deal of funds are going toward assistive technology, would DBVI consider approaching the Lions Club and the DBVI Board for funds? He believes that these groups would be very interested in purchasing services for individuals. Mr. Hopkins stated that DBVI's customers are required to use comparable benefits. Use of comparable benefits was discussed with field staff at the November staff meeting. Consumer choice is also a part of determining who will provide services. The DBVI Board is also experiencing some surprise in budget trends based on the market and Board investments.

Ms. Beattie stated that at the last session of the legislature, the SRC was involved with other advocacy groups in advocating about the two VR agencies remaining separate.

Mr. DeBoer stated that DRS went on an order of selection on November 15, 2008, closing all categories. New customers are being place on a waiting list.

### **Appointments to the SRC**

Appointments/reappointments to the SRC have not been finalized by the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. Ms. Payne will review policy on how Virginia handles members attending meetings who are leaving the Council until new appointments are made. She will share that information with members next week.

### **Accessibility Policy**

Mr. Powell, Dr. Rick Mitchell, regional manager of the DBVI Bristol office, and Ms. Bardone drafted an agency Accessibility Policy which was forwarded to members prior to the SRC meeting for their review. After much discussion, it was moved by Mr. Kasey, seconded by Mr. Powell, and passed by unanimous vote that the Council officially supports the accessibility policy as drafted. DBVI will be discussing the policy with the senior management team; Mr. Hopkins expects that DBVI will be adopting the revised accessibility policy. Review of the Accessibility Policy is on the December management team agenda.

### **Update on Regional Offices - Mr. Burton**

The following vacancies are not currently being recruited due to budget restrictions: Fairfax has an education coordinator position, an O & M specialist, and a rehabilitation teacher. Norfolk has one O&M specialist position open. Ronica Henry who has worked at the NRO in the past has filled the position vacated by the VR counselor who is retiring January 1, 2009. Richmond has one rehabilitation teacher and one office services specialist; however, one part-time individual is working with processing bills through AWARE. Roanoke has one rehabilitation teacher position open.

The VRCBVI director, Melody Lindsey, has hired an executive secretary, a licensed practical nurse, and has offered the VR evaluator/counselor to someone. Interviews for an O&M specialist position took place this week;

second interviews will be conducted before the holidays. Interviews will be held for a Braille instructor this coming week.

DBVI went live with AWARE on October 1. DBVI is still developing business practices. A General Memorandum was issued to staff regarding new documentation requirements for AWARE. This requirement removes the six-month case summary and requires VR counselors to make case notes for all face-to-face visits explaining what was accomplished at the meeting and what issues need to be addressed later. These notes can be made during the visit with the customer.

The Roanoke office is preparing for a move into the Crossroads Mall in June and will be sharing space with DRS, VEC, and DSS offices.

Mr. Burton report that LRC director, Barbara McCarthy, has shared a survey conducted by Channel 12 where students called all state agencies for one week determining how long it took an agency to answer calls. There were 21 different agencies contacted. DBVI's average was 16 seconds. There was one state agency reported as taking as long as 13 minutes 31 seconds to answer a call. One other agency was reported as ringing busy all the time. In response to Mr. DeBoer's question, Mr. Burton reported that the first agency was DRS and the second agency was Department of Aging.

### **Standards and Indicators**

DBVI passed the standards and indicators for the most recent two-year period. Ninety-five point six percent (95.6%) of all successful closures were competitive employment. Standard #5 is a comparison of average hourly wages. Mr. Burton compared average hourly wages (\$13.85) for VR customers closed in competitive employment to the average hourly wages (\$21.18) for all employed persons in Virginia.

### **VR Program Update - Ms. Payne**

#### **Annual Report for FFY 2008**

The draft Annual Report was forwarded to SRC members for their review and input prior to the meeting as action must be taken at this meeting to approve the report to be forwarded to RSA and the Secretary of Health and Human Resource's office by December 31.

Mr. Powell asked the question “what is a succession plan?” Ms. Payne reported that DBVI and other state agencies have been developing succession plans. The DBVI plan includes providing leadership training to agency staff. Part of the training includes courses that will be taught by agency staff. Mr. Burton outlined courses that will be offered to staff. Mr. Powell asked if a job development and placement position could be considered using one VR counselor position. Due to the limited number of counselors, DBVI will not consider converting any of the 18 VR counselor positions to job development and placement positions. DBVI has provided job development training to VR staff in the fall of 2007.

Ms. Beattie suggested that DBVI replace “advisory” with “working in partnership” or “partnership”, as appropriate, in the 2009 Annual Report.

A motion was made by Mr. Kasey, and seconded by Mr. Franklin, and passed by unanimous vote to support the Annual Report for submittal to RSA and the Secretary’s office as distributed.

### **State Plan Update for FY 2009**

DBVI was requested by RSA to revise five sections of the 2009 State Plan; revisions were submitted on August 22, 2008. DBVI received approval from RSA for those five sections on September 24.

### **Update of VR Outcomes for FY 2008**

- Total referrals – 1,261 with average of 66 per VR counselor
- Average earnings at case opening was \$13.43
- Average age of customers being closed was 42
- Average cost of \$10,048

Upon Mr. Kasey’s request, Ms. Payne will provide members with a copy of the 360 report (types of job obtained by customers and wages earned) redacted.

### **Fall 2008 Public Meetings**

DBVI conducted five public meetings in Bristol, Arlington, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, and Fredericksburg. Though there were no participants at the Bristol public meeting, DBVI had approximately 100 participants this year. Ms. Bardone suggested using a web cast for future public meeting. She reported that multiple formats and mediums are used

by other agencies when they conduct public meetings. Ms. Bardone indicated that the flexibility of multiple mediums may encourage more participation. Some members of the SRC expressed concern about the low number of participants. Mr. Hopkins reported that existing customers express concerns/comments to managers and staff on a regular basis.

Public comments and DBVI responses will be prepared and posted to the website the end of January 2009. They will be forwarded to members once they have been completed.

DBVI will probably participate in one more public meeting which will be conducted in March in collaboration with DRS during the 2009 Transition Forum in Norfolk.

### **2009 Transition Conference and Public Meeting**

Sixteen field, HQ, and VRCBVI staff will attend the Transition Forum in March of 2009. DBVI staff are representing the agency on the Planning Committee, the Accessibility Committee, and in one presentation which will be conducted by Dan Aunspach from VRCBVI.

Ms. Payne asked if the Council was interested in participating in the public meeting with DRS at the 2009 Transition Forum. She will be attending the meeting anyway. Ms. Matney commented that it would be a good idea because of the increase of audience. Ms. Bardone will contact DRS to check about communication access interest and accessibility.

### **Satisfaction Survey**

DBVI is using the Satisfaction Survey that was revised based on SRC recommendations during the 2008 fiscal year. For the first time, DBVI has begun to send electronic copies of the survey to individuals wanting to respond via e-mail. One individual has responded using e-mail so far, and DBVI anticipates that number will increase.

### **Report on Fall 2008 VR Staff Meeting**

The VR staff meeting conducted in November included a session regarding WorkWORLD. WorkWORLD is a benefits planning tool developed by VCU in conjunction with a grant from SSA. VR staff had the opportunity to actually enter data into the system to see how individuals receiving SSI/SSDI would be affected in terms of benefits when they enter gainful

employment. Ms. Payne conducted a session regarding the roles and responsibilities of the SRC.

### **General Memorandum to DBVI VR Staff Regarding Services to Individuals Jointly Served by VR and RT and Case File Documentation**

A General Memorandum (GM) was sent to DBVI VR staff regarding services to individuals who are jointly served by VR and RT. This GM provided staff with clarification regarding the provision of RT services for individuals who are receiving VR and RT services at the same time. When RT is being provided to VR customers, the individual's employment plan will include adjustment to blindness services and any other RT goods or services.

### **Subcommittee Reports:**

#### **Transportation**

Mr. Ames was not present to give an official report.

#### **Transition – Ms. Moore**

Data collections have been completed for the Department of Education State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR). Stakeholder meetings are being held to review data and activities designed to improve results. The report will be sent to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) on February 1, 2009.

The Virginia Transition Forum 2009 will be held in Norfolk from March 16 - 18. A student and parent summit are being planned. The pre-conference presentation will be provided by Rick Lavoie, an educator who specializes in motivating hard to motivate students. Individuals may register at [www.virginiatransitionforum.org](http://www.virginiatransitionforum.org).

State Special Education Regulations have been approved by the State Board of Education. They are currently with the Executive Branch.

Ms. Moore recently attended a conference regarding access to post-secondary education and received valuable information. It was suggested that Ms. Quisenberry, the transition caseload carrying VR counselor in the Richmond office, may benefit a great deal by attending next year's session.



Ms. Beattie reported that the VATS Council is looking at what happens to equipment when students leave secondary education for post-secondary school. The VATS Council is inquiring about ways for equipment to stay with students rather than go back to the school system. Ms. Beattie reported that currently students in the public education system learn how to use equipment and have to give it back to the school system resulting other programs such as VR having to purchase new equipment. Ms. Moore volunteered to work with Ms. Beattie on this issue.

**Coordination with DRS SRC – Ms. Metcalf and Mr. DeBoer**

Ms. Metcalf was unable to attend the SRC meeting due to an emergency. However, she did share a copy of a letter from the DRS SRC to Governor Timothy M. Kaine requesting his assistance in broadening the public meeting provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act to allow expanded participation in Board and Council meeting by videoconferencing or teleconferencing as a cost savings measure.

Mr. DeBoer indicated that he noticed that many issues at DBVI are the same as DRS. He mentioned that the DRS SRC does a retreat each year about specific items and then follows with the quarterly meeting the next day. DRS SRC has developed a committee to discuss order of selection and how to approach legislators. Another topic is the structure of the Council and how to deal with various issues. He inquired about how DBVI subcommittees meet to conduct business. Mr. Beattie stated that the DBVI SRC is considering having subcommittees meet ahead of time and submit notes or minutes of meetings to members prior to the next meeting. This would enable members to be ready for open discussion during the meeting and provide important feedback at that time. Ms. Payne will find out what time limit is required for posting of state planned meetings.

**DBVI Mentoring Work Group** – SRC representatives on the workgroup include Ms. Matney, Mr. Powell, Ms. Macon, DBVI represented Mr. Taylor, Mr. Sorey, and Ms. Lindsey. The workgroup drafted four documents which were forwarded to members prior to the meeting for their review: 1) Mentee Questionnaire; 2) Mentor Questionnaire; 3) Winners! Flyer; and 4) Winners! Brochure.

After much discussion, it was decided that suggestions/edits be sent directly to Ms. Matney next week. Ms. Payne will coordinate a conference call for

the committee to consider suggestions. She will also assist the committee with editing and preparing the mentoring documents.

Mr. Kasey stated that DBVI needs to keep it simple and get the program together as soon as possible.

Mr. Powell reported that the program schedule has not been established yet, and they need to develop an implementation schedule.

Ms. Bardone suggested that as they go into final revision, the workgroup should be cautious in using questions with two parts. In questionnaires, simple questions provide more information. It is important to get the program out to the media. This would be a wonderful uplifting news story. Press is always interested in active visual images – people doing something.

**Update from CSAVR and NCSAB – Ms. Beattie**

RSA will be publishing two new monographs in their Institute for Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) annual series, probably out in print and electronic formats very early in 2009. Both should be of interest to DBVI staff and the SRC. Ms. Beattie was a reader/commenter on the publication "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" regarding relationships and partnerships among the public vocational rehabilitation program, the Veterans Administration, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Labor in providing services to veterans, especially those now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disabilities, including hearing and/or vision loss. The other is on vocational rehabilitation services for older workers. With our DBVI average customer age at 42 and the rapidly increasing number of people experiencing age-related vision loss, this publication should also be of particular interest to us.

The National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils was the first of four meetings attended by SRC Chair Ms. Beattie. The NCSRC did not discuss its upcoming final versions of organizational details, but indicated they would be announced shortly by the Steering Committee. The one-day meeting focused on the SRC roles and responsibilities for a tri-annual statewide needs assessment. Several other blindness agencies reported being pleased with results of contracting with the Mississippi State University for help with this project. Others contracted with a state university in their state and were not always pleased with their knowledge

of VR and the disability community. A module of the internet-based training for SRCs was the basis for a presentation on promising practices.

Later in the week of meetings in San Diego, members of SRCs in seven states attended an evening meeting to discuss the future of a Blindness SRC, Boards and Commissions Network which has been holding bi-monthly conference calls funded by the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and the leadership of Dr. Pearl VanZant, Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind. Pat Beattie has been facilitating the conference calls in which Mr. Powell also has been participating. Notice of the next conference call to be held Monday, February 2 at 8:30 p.m. eastern time will be sent to our SRC with call-in information.

There were several references during the CSAVR meeting of the potential of Connie Garner being considered for the position of Assistant Secretary of Education for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. She currently is principal staff for disability programs for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee chaired by Senator Ted Kennedy. She is not a supporter of specialized categorical services for people who are blind, especially wanting to open the Randolph-Sheppard program to other disabilities. There also was some mention of the possibility that one of our SRC members, Dr. Fred Schroeder, might also be tapped for a position in the Obama administration.

Theme for the NCSAB conference was collaboration to defend and expand specialized/categorical services to meet the unique needs of people who are blind. Presentations included perspectives and experiences of separate state agencies, changes when a blind commission is swept up into a mega-state human services agency such as recently happened in Texas and how consumer organization typically jointly support categorical services, but legislatures are even more than usually now looking for potential budget savings by abolishing specialized services, such as current threats in Massachusetts.

The Blind Entrepreneurial Alliance, a coalition working to defend the Randolph-Sheppard vending program, reported plans to go on the offensive, developing internet video profiles of successful vendors and drafting proposed legislation to help fend off threats from Capitol Hill and

NISH, one part of the AvilityOne program under the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD). Our SRC need to monitor such developments, especially in upcoming legislation, so as not to threaten contract service opportunities now being expanded by Virginia Industries for the Blind.

**Working lunch – meeting continues - Opportunity for Members to take a Couple of Minutes to Provide an Update on Organizations Represented or Other Activities of Interest to the Council (Optional)**

Ms. Adams discussed the new Voter's Guide that has been published by VOPA. She will send the guide to Ms. Carneal to share with members on Monday. She informed members they could contact VOPA via the website if they wished to express concern that VDBVI.

Mr. Kasey stated that it was Louis Braille's 200-year anniversary. Reiterated that Braille is important and referred to the Annual Report on the low number of individuals who use Braille. The slate and stylus is a very inexpensive method for blind and visually impaired individuals to use for independence and employment. Each one of us, including the Council, may consider some activities regarding promotion of Braille. He encouraged people to volunteer at VRCBVI and DBVI.

Ms. Brunson announced that ACB radio will be streaming some of the events related to the 200-year Louis Braille celebration. Also, the national ACB office will be relocating to Arlington next week. She announced that Mr. Powell was the new state president for the Old Dominion Council of the Blind.

Ms. Bardone commended ACB regarding on high definition TV; however, the article did not include captioning. If you are using captioning, HDTV works differently with every connection so you must read the manual to set it up accurately.

Mr. DeBoer thanked members for the hospitality. He took lots of notes and will share them with the DRS SRC.

Mr. Powell stated that he was looking forward to the presidency of the Old Dominion Council of the Blind. He recently participated in a triathlon using guides for the first time. He is interested in participating in an Iron Man Triathlon competition in the future.

**Other Business**

Mr. Powell stated that he has seen a dramatic change in the way staff and SRC members work together. It is important to acknowledge that DBVI is doing well on behalf of blind people in Virginia. He thanked staff in how they and SRC work together on various projects by working in a true partnership.

Adjournment: There being no other business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m. The next meeting will be held at the DBVI Headquarters Conference Room I/II, 397 Azalea Avenue, on Saturday, March 14, 2009, at 10:00 a.m.